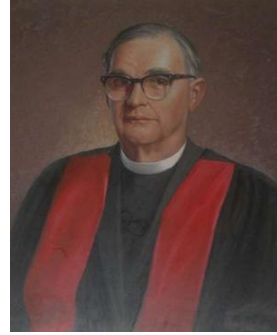


‘The Bible: Is it Relevant?’

By Leon Morris
“Australian Church Record”



How can a book drawn up over centuries, but all long gone since, by people in and around Palestine, have any real significance for people like you and me who live in this mad age of rush, atom bombs and duodenal ulcers?

Let us approach this question via another question I am sometimes asked, “Is the Bible true?” And this second question leads me to pose a third, “Does it matter?” For indeed too many people it is almost an axiom that it does not matter, since it is quite possible to get on with the serious business of living in blissful unawareness of its teachings.

These days I find a number of folk anxious to restore the “good life” of the ancient Greeks, “good” in this sense being not morally good, but good in the sense of well-rounded, a life with many interests, a rational life filled with the enjoyment of truth, beauty and the sheer joy of living and without the prejudices and fears which keep some from attaining the full stature of man. Life in this sense does not require such a guide as the Bible, indeed it would be something of a hindrance since it insists on eternal verities which might well interfere with the full enjoyment of one’s own possibilities here and now.

There are some who think that it is quite possible to go further and to live a highly moral life without the Bible, and such would indeed seem to be the case. I have known highly moral atheists, and there are many people in our community who have high standards of conduct, but whose acquaintance with the Scriptures is negligible.

In a book I was reading recently the author remarked that “it is recorded in the legends of our race” that God became man and submitted Himself to the processes of Roman Law. The writer was earnestly contending for a “religious” attitude to life, and indeed his entire book was written with a view to combating the widespread indifference to spiritual realities. But his contention is that the Bible can be regarded as no more than the repository of “the legends of our race” — it has some useful ideas, but it can hardly be said to be indispensable, or even very valuable. Such are some of the ideas of our day.

But the Christian cannot accept any such approach, for his is not a religion of ideas. There are such faiths in the world, as for example, Buddhism. To ask whether Buddhist Scriptures were true or not (at least in the sense of whether they gave a true record of happenings in former days), would be almost a meaningless question. It does not matter greatly whether Gautama the Buddha lived or not, it does not matter whether he gave forth the teaching attributed to him or not. Somebody uttered these words and it is the teaching that matters, not the person who produced it, nor the acts he did. The result is that in our day we should follow this teaching, and not be unduly concerned with the problem of historicity.

Islam, although holding fast to the inspiration of the Koran, is in some respects similar. The important part of this religion from the practical angle, is the performance of a few simple deeds — the recital of the creed with full meaning, the daily prayers, fasting in the month of Ramadan,

if possible making the pilgrimage to Mecca. The emphasis is on the performance of these requirements, and it matters little who Muhammad was or indeed whether he lived. What matters is the performance of one's duty.

But for Christianity this kind of attitude is not possible, because Christianity is not primarily a religion of ideas, but a Gospel. Christianity does put ideas before people, some of them great and notable, but first and foremost it is not these ideas, but the good news that God has taken action in Jesus Christ for the salvation of those who believe. The life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus cannot be regarded as matters of little importance for as Paul says of one of them, the resurrection, "if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain."

Unless these things are true, Christianity falls to the ground, for it is the religion which asserts that man can only be saved because of God's atoning work in His Son.

So then the question of the truth or otherwise of the Bible can never be regarded by the Christian as a matter of no moment. If these things did not happen then the basis of his faith has been taken away. The answer to the third of the questions we posed at the beginning then emerges as "It matters very much whether the Bible is true or not, because the whole of Christianity is at stake," and this same answer gives us the clue to the first question. The Bible is relevant today because it is the authoritative record of the Christian faith. Because it tells of those great events in which God became man and wrought out the process of man's salvation at terrible cost. It is relevant because it speaks to man's need, because everyone who comes to it humbly and listens for the voice of God, comes to hear that voice, and to know God's power.

Tilak, the Indian poet, was given a Bible and when he first read it he tells us "I could not tear myself away from those burning words of love and tenderness and truth."

And it is because any who comes genuinely seeking a word from God has a similar experience that we affirm unhesitatingly the relevance of the Bible today.

The 'Australian Church Record' is an evangelical newspaper in the Reformed Anglican tradition, according to its Website. The author, Leon Morris, 1914 – 2006, was a leading evangelical New Testament scholar. Morris began the Evangelical Alliance of Victoria and helped produce the NIV and ESV translations of the Bible. He has authored or co-authored over fifty books and was the editor of the Tyndale New Testament Commentary series. He has published several theological works and commentaries on the Bible, according to Theopedia.com.